



## OES VS SIES: EXPLORING THE CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF HOTEL EXPATRIATES IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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### Abstract

The study examines the cross-cultural adjustment of organizational and self-initiated expatriates. Specifically, the study aims at identifying whether the two groups of expatriates differ in their adjustment. The focus of the study is on Malaysian hotel expatriates. Since expatriate adjustment is conceptualized as a multifaceted construct encompassing work, general, interaction and overall adjustment, the study also looks at the variations in the patterns of work adjustment, general adjustment, interaction adjustment and the expatriates' overall adjustment. Two hundred and three expatriates participated in the study, of which, 95 respondents (46.8%) were organizational expatriates (OEs) and 108 (53.2%) were self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). With respect to adjustment, while the data which was drawn from a drop and collect method show some variations in work, general, interaction and overall adjustment, the composite measure of the overall adjustment reveals that, on the whole, respondents are well adjusted to working and living in Malaysia. The results, discussions and limitations of the study are presented in the paper.

**Keywords:** expatriate adjustment; organizational expatriates; self-initiated expatriates; hotel industry

### OEs vs SIEs:

Exploring the Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Hotel Expatriates in a Multicultural Society

Studies on expatriation have shown the association between cultural environment and adjustment and how the relationship affects the individual adjustments, attitudes and behaviors (see for example Selmer, 2001; Yavas & Bodur, 1999). Church (1982) notes that culturally adjusted expatriates are open to the host culture and thus, able to adjust their behaviors, norms and rules to the present environment. On the other hand, maladjusted expatriates will experience anxiety which leads to various negative work-related consequences such as lower job satisfaction and performance (Naumann, 1993), to the extent that it leads to premature return to the home country (Harzing, 1995). Hence, expatriate cross-cultural adjustment has become an important research area in international business and cross-cultural communication literature. Although research on expatriation, especially on the factors that may facilitate or inhibit expatriate adjustment have been implicit, there is still lack of empirical research investigating the adjustment of SIEs, especially those attached to the hotel industry. As argued by Shay and Tracey (1997) and Causin, Ayoun and Moreo (2010), more studies are needed to look at adjustment among hospitality practitioners as to date only a handful of published studies have explored the issue in hotel industry. Causin et al. (2010) point out that desirable attributes for expatriates in the hotel industry are somewhat different from those of other industries. Shay and Tracey (1997) and Tung (1981) further noted that adaptability, flexibility and good communication skills may be desirable attributes for expatriate managers in general, the nature of the hospitality industry requires a highly developed set of interpersonal and relational skills. Furthermore, this group of expatriate must understand the local culture and comprehend the needs of a diverse customer base.

Besides, it was also found that most research on expatriation had the tendency to concentrate on homogeneous and developed cultures such as Hong Kong, China, Japan and North America as assignment destinations (Black, 1988; Black, 1990a, 1990b; Black & Gregersen, 1991a; Selmer, 2001), as well as those originated from a single country like North America or Japan (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991b; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Selmer, 2001; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). As argued by Kittler, Rygl, MacKinnon and Wiedemann (2011), studies on expatriates in Asian countries (mostly conducted in homogeneous cultures) seem to have dominated past research efforts. While it is acknowledged that there has been research conducted on expatriates originating from a number of different countries locating in a single location (see for example Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer, 2001; Shaffer, Gregersen, Harrison, Black & Ferzandi, 2006; Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999), these research however, did not look at the difference in adjustment of expatriates to the country of assignment.

Reviews of the literature have also revealed that empirical studies comparing adjustment of expatriates in a developing, multiracial country are still scarce. Copeland and Griggs (1985, p. xix), noted that "almost 20 to 50 per cent of international relocations end with premature return" and the failure rate has been high (almost 70 per cent) to those assigned to developing countries. Among the reasons attributed to higher failure rates, especially among American expatriates are: (1) the inability of the spouse to adapt to the host culture; (2) the inability of the expatriates themselves to adapt to the host culture; and (3) family-related problems associated with foreign assignment. The higher failure rate in developing countries is described as rather frightening as this is the region where the most "attractive" and "growing" countries of the world are located (Shay & Tracey, 1997, p. 32). As the literature reveals, studies conducted specifically in Malaysia are also scarce (see Subramaniam, Raduan, Jegak & Nareh, 2010; Mohd. Tahir & Ismail, 2007). It is strongly believed that as a developing, multicultural society, Malaysia is worth investigating especially when the country has become one of the preferred foreign direct investment (FDI) destinations in the South East Asia (MIDA, 2009). Together with aggressive promotion on Malaysia as a tourism destination, it is anticipated that the country will experience a continuous increase in the number of expatriates working in the country. A report by MIDA (2009) revealed that in 2007, there were almost 35, 593 expatriates working in the country.

Based on the arguments presented above, it is therefore believed that more research is needed to investigate the phenomenon of adjustment of hotel expatriates working in Malaysia.

### Types of Expatriates

While the literature on OEs are now abundance and the phenomenon is now becoming well-understood, another group of expatriates which offers another alternative for research and understanding is explored, that of those who travel abroad to find job opportunities, experiences and challenges (the SIEs). This group of individual expatriate has been traveling all over the world for a long time and their numbers are increasing. However, though they form a larger and even more potent labor market segment (Myers & Pringle, 2005, p. 1) very little is known about them. Inkson, Pringle, Arthur and Barry (1997) pioneered the research on this group of expatriates in 1997 but only in recent years the number has begun to increase. Regardless, only a handful of research focusing on this group is available (refer Myers & Pringle, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Selmer & Laurant, 2011) and mostly, research on SIEs looked at those in other industries, especially academic and not in hotel industry even though for individual hospitality expatriates, many are attached to the hotel industry. Even though it is acknowledged that there have been research distinguishing OEs and SIEs in terms of adjustment (see for example Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009), the research were more focused on academic expatriates and those attached to other industries such as manufacturing, oil and gas and finance. Even though Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) acknowledged that SIEs and OEs are separate groups of expatriates that should be distinguished in conceptual and empirical accounts and beside their notable differences (i.e Inkson et al., 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), these two groups of expatriates have often been lumped and examined together with possibly misleading empirical results. Thus, preventing researchers to obtain accurate information about SIEs. If no distinction is made between the two groups of expatriates and across the industry and data consists mostly of OEs in manufacturing and other business-related industries, findings of research are unlikely to provide accurate presentation of expatriate adjustment.



Research and academic discussions of SIEs are increasing, highlighting emerging distinction between OEs and SIEs. As scholars have now began to show interests in SIEs, more information can be obtained about the differences in the adjustment between OEs and SIEs. As discussed in the literature, most research on OEs and SIEs are more focused on expatriates attached to various industries such as manufacturing, engineering and academic (Inkson et al., 1997; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). A specific research by Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) shows that OEs and SIEs are two expatriates types who are different in their adjustment and are more adjusted to general cultural aspects. Their differences are attributed to the differences in motivation and frequency of cross-cultural interaction with the host. This can be related to the nature of SIEs themselves. Looking at the definition again, SIEs are the group of expatriates who initiate their own mobility and hence, they are often motivated by the interest in a given foreign country. OEs on the other hand, are sent by parent companies and they may know little about the country of assignment. Even though they receive more assistance from the organization (such as housing or area of residence), they are still less adjusted than SIEs.

Since SIEs initiate their own move to other countries, they are anticipated to be more motivated to learn faster and more about the country. The easier the learning process, the better their adjustment will be. This is consistent with what is described in the social learning theory (SLT) about learning behavior which suggests that in order for organizational learning (expatriation) to be successful, the expatriate has to be motivated to initiate positive behaviors that have been modeled (Bandura, 1977). During the process, communication and interaction with hosts is crucial as it helps expatriates to obtain information regarding what is appropriate and what is not in the new society. Through the feedback received from people of the host country, an expatriate will be able to adjust their behavior to comply with the current situation.

Therefore, having to discuss the differences, it is also anticipated that SIEs and OEs in hotel industry also differ in their adjustment to a new cultural environment. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated to test the significant differences in the pattern of adjustment between OEs and SIEs in hotel industry and if there is, in which area of adjustment (general, interaction or work).

*Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference in the pattern of adjustment between OEs and SIEs in hotel industry?*

### **Perspectives of Adjustment**

Previous works on expatriate adjustment suggests that adjustment is a multidimensional construct (Black & Gregersen, 1991a). The multidimensionality of the adjustment process has been discussed from various perspectives in the cross-cultural communication, acculturation and expatriation literature. The following section takes a closer look at how the different literature views adjustment.

#### **Communication Perspective**

In the cross-cultural communication framework, two areas of adjustment have been identified: social adjustment (Furnham & Bochner, 1982) and communication adaptability (Wheeless & Duran, 1982). Studies on these two facets of adjustment mainly focus on adjustment of sojourners, particularly international students. Furnham and Bochner (1982) suggest that the stress experienced by international students is caused by the inability to socially adjust to the host culture. This largely results from their lack of social skills needed to deal with the new situation. It is also suggested that an individual might face a major source of stress when dealing with an unfamiliar culture, especially in everyday interpersonal encounters with people of the host nation such as being in the streets, shops, bars and around strangers. There are a variety of factors that affect the social adjustment process. The inability to communicate that includes speaking and understanding the language used in the host country is important in ensuring the development of social relations with the host nationals.

Adaptability on the other hand, is an important concept in communication competence (Cegala, 1981). It focuses "on the ability of the communicator to be flexible in communicating with a variety of people in a variety of situations" (Wheeless & Duran, 1982, p. 54). This, according to Wheelless and Duran "centers around a variety of experiences and the ability to be flexible and feel comfortable with a variety of people" (p. 55). Researchers have identified how an individual's personal characteristics such as personality, psychological and socio-demographic variables influence their communication behaviors (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Falcione, 1977; McCroskey, Daly & Sorensen, 1976). Beside personality, cultural differences are also found to affect an individual's communication behavior.

#### **Acculturation Perspective**

Three areas of adjustment are identified in the acculturation literature. Searle and Ward (1990) propose psychological and sociocultural adjustment while Aycan and Berry (1996) and Hawes and Kealey (1981) propose work adjustment. Psychological adjustment refers to psychological well-being and satisfaction, which includes a feeling of satisfaction with the various aspects of life. Unlike psychological adjustment, sociocultural adjustment refers to the social skills or the ability to "fit in" into the new cultural environment (Searle & Ward, 1990). Simply, this refers to an individual's ability to handle problems associated with living their lives, how they work toward becoming effective in the new culture and how they engage in positive interactions with the host nationals (Aycan, 1997). Work adjustment simply refers to how an individual accomplishes their tasks and their attitude towards work (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and this is marked by good performance and a positive attitude towards the new job. The concept of psychological adjustment is actually based on a problem-oriented view that focuses on attitudinal factors in the process of adjustment (Oberg, 1960), whilst the sociocultural adjustment is based on the cultural learning theory. It focuses on the social behavior and social skills that underlie attitudinal factors (Black & Mendenhall, 1991).

In the acculturation literature, acculturation attitudes are considered important for successful adjustment (Aycan, 1997). Berry (1980) who proposed a model of acculturation attitudes addresses two critical issues with regard to an individual attitude toward the host culture (Figure 1). While the first issue concerns whether or not an individual values maintaining his/her own cultural characteristics, the second issue concerns whether or not maintaining relationships with people of the host culture is considered to be of value. The model suggests that if the response to the first issue is "no" and to the second issue is "yes", "assimilation" occurs. This means that the acculturating individual does not wish to maintain his/her cultural characteristics but instead, seeks to relate with groups in the host society. "Separation" is the opposite of assimilation. This is the urge to maintain one's own culture and identity. As a result, the individual does not want to interact with host nationals. Meanwhile, "integration" occurs when the individual is willing to interact with others in the host society, but at the same time, still maintains his/her cultural identity. The final sector, "marginalization" takes place when an individual is not interested in maintaining his/her own culture or even interacting with host nationals. Berry notes that among the four, integration predicts good mental health and produce lower level of stress among sojourning individuals.

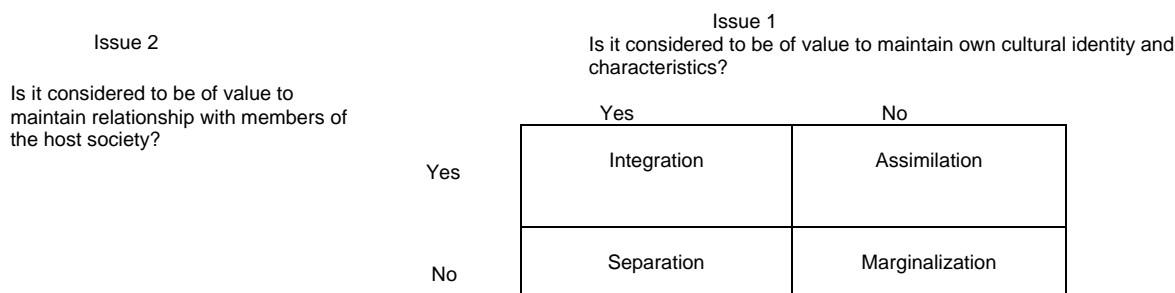


Figure 1: Model of Acculturation Attitudes  
Source: Berry (1980)

Aycan (1997) notes that the application of acculturation attitudes is more evident in the organizational behavior literature, but the framework has never been utilized in studies of expatriate adjustment. The model of acculturation attitudes discussed earlier predicts that an integrationist attitude in both work and social life will yield successful adjustment. This is based on two reasons. Firstly, as the expatriate moves to a new culture, it is necessary for them to adopt the norms and values of the host country. This is to ensure that they function efficiently in the social and work contexts. In this case, willingness to interact with people of the host nation is crucial at this stage. The SLT also suggests that interaction with hosts helps expatriates to obtain information regarding what is appropriate and what is not in the new society. Secondly, interaction with hosts and the efforts shown in learning their ways of doing things help the expatriates to prove to the locals that they value and appreciate the new culture and that they are putting the efforts into learning their ways. In return, the hosts will display greater acceptance and co-operation towards the expatriate.

Ward and Kennedy (1993) believe that there are three main points that need to be considered when theorizing cultural influences on psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Firstly, they believe that variables that affect adjustment should be distinguished either as cultural general or cultural specific. Secondly, they also claim that the level of psychological and sociocultural adjustment differs according to the characteristics of the group and the purpose of the sojourn (i.e. expatriation, travelling, studying and so on). Lastly, they also believe that the relationship between psychological and sociocultural adjustment also varies according to the expatriate or sojourner's experiences, and this includes their adjustment strategies and how they integrate into the host society. They maintain that the distinction between psychological and sociocultural adjustment has proven to be very useful in cross-cultural adjustment and even though the two forms of adjustment are conceptually interrelated, they are actually distinct concepts and are being predicted by different variable.

### Expatriation Perspective

The earlier research on adjustment to a foreign culture mainly focuses on adjustment to social contexts such as food, weather, interaction with host nationals or the culture in general. However, the later research on adjustment has suggested that there are three areas of adjustment: adjustment to the general environment, adjustment to interaction with host nationals and adjustment to work (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black et al., 1991). Adjustment to the general environment is the area that has been widely studied by researchers and scholars. It encompasses those factors that affect the daily lifestyles of expatriates such as weather, food and entertainment. When expatriates enter a new culture, they must learn the whole new set of norms, values and practices of the host culture, which are different from their own. This new set of norms, values and practices is not stated anywhere and it is the responsibility of the expatriate to learn and adjust. Studies have revealed that the more similar the home country and the host country, the easier the adjustment will be. Expatriates who come from China to Malaysia for example, would experience less difficulty in adjusting to the new culture as compared to those who are being assigned to the middle-east. In one of the studies conducted by Black and his colleagues, they found that successful adjustment which eventually leads to the completion of foreign assignment is linked more closely to expatriates ability to adjust to the new culture rather than to adjustment to work.

Adjustment to interaction, on the other hand, involves the level of comfort that employees feel when interacting with members of the host culture. Black et al. (1992a) believe that this is the most difficult area of adjustment because usually the differences between individuals will be revealed when they communicate. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) state that an individual with good relational skills will find less difficulty to interact with people of the host nation. Those with good interpersonal communication skills in their home culture will normally adjust better to the new culture as compared to their counterparts who possess lower levels of interpersonal communication skills. It is also noted that expatriates with good relational skills are able to apply the principles of human interaction in different cultures. Thus, this makes it easier for them to relate to the host nationals.

Adjustment to work is described as the level at which employees are adjusted to their job tasks, work roles and work environment, as well as the level at which they are able to perform within that environment. This is thought to be the easiest area of adjustment if compared to the other two (Black et al., 1992a) though it does not necessarily mean that it is easy to do. The suggestion is made as studies on American, European and Japanese expatriates revealed that their adjustment to work is very much influenced by the similarities in "procedures, policies and requirements" (p. 117) of the job in the home and host countries. Even though those factors could be similar, other factors such as business practices could be different and this is the time when the expatriates have to adjust to suit to the local practices but still manage to achieve the target outcomes. Some of the work-related variables that are found to be related to work adjustment are role clarity, role discretion, role conflict, role novelty and organizational culture.

Black et al. (1991) maintain that the combination of the three areas of adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) is important in determining the overall degree to which expatriates are able to adjust to their new cultural environment. They also argue that cultural adjustment should be viewed as a multidimensional concept and not as a single variable. However, it is also important to treat each area of adjustment separately as some important variables that affect adjustment may not be equally related to all three areas of adjustment (Black et al., 1992a).

*Hypothesis 2: There are variations in the patterns of work, general, interaction and the overall adjustment among the expatriates*

### Methods

#### Participants

The unit of analysis of this study is the individual expatriate (both OEs and SIEs) attached to the Malaysian hotel industry. As most research seem to suggest that international studies usually had low response rates due to the lack of available research channels to reach the target population (Naumann, 1993), this study tries to ensure as large participation as possible from the respondents. Thus, several



steps were devised in order to reach the target respondents. First, after several failed attempts in obtaining the sampling frame, an expatriate association in Kuala Lumpur was contacted via email to request for information on hotel expatriates. The organization was very helpful and supportive of the project and it provided a list of all hotels in Malaysia (multinationals and international joint venture hotel companies), listed under their membership. The list contained the name of hotels, rankings, addresses, contact numbers, as well as the availability of expatriates at the premises. From the list, it was found that there were a total number of 667 hotels in Malaysia and 337 of them (3-, 4- and 5-star hotels) are located in Peninsular Malaysia. Stratified random sampling was the most appropriate sampling method used in the study, as these hotels were stratified based on the rankings and regions where the hotels are located.

From that, calls were then made to all 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels in Peninsular Malaysia (the study did not include hotels in the Borneo) to identify the number of expatriates working at each identified premise. Their positions ranged from General Managers (GMs) to non-managerial positions such as chef and technical experts. Hotel policies require that any information pertaining to expatriates cannot be revealed, only the numbers can be released. Based from the calls, it was identified that there were 323 expatriates attached to hotels in Peninsular Malaysia and this would mean that the appropriate sample size identified for the present study should be 175 (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007), at a 95 per cent level of certainty (5 per cent margin of error).

### Instrumentation

The questionnaire survey, specifically the self-administered questionnaire was the key part of data collection used in the study. The drop and collect method was used in the distribution of the survey. To ensure the safety and privacy of the expatriates, the questionnaires were distributed to the GMs' or human resources' office and from there, these offices would distribute the questionnaire to the individual expatriate working at the premise. This would also mean that the distribution of questionnaire was left to the discretion of the respective offices. The hotels advised that the questionnaire could only be collected in a week or so, so that the expatriates would have enough time to respond to it. Of the total number of questionnaires distributed, 241 questionnaires were returned and after the cleaning process, 203 usable data were analyzed, which yielded a 74.6 per cent returned, usable rate. The response rate is comparable to previous studies conducted by authors in different geographical settings (Kittler et al., 2009) and was considered a respectable figure for research involving expatriates (Selmer, 2006).

### Measurements

The information on whether these expatriates were OEs or SIEs were obtained from the self-report obtained in the demographic information section of the questionnaire. The question asked "How did you come to Malaysia?" with the choices of answers being 1=sent by parent company; and 2=individual/own initiative.

Measures for the expatriates overall adjustment were based on a 14-item instrument developed by Black (1988). The items were divided into three dimensions—general, interaction and work adjustments. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 (not adjusted at all) to 5 (very well adjusted), the degree to which they are adjusted to the items. The reliability value of the instrument was  $\alpha = .92$ , which was rather high. For each dimension, the reliability values are: general adjustment ( $\alpha = .87$ ), interaction ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and work ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

### Results

#### Descriptive Statistics

Of all the respondents, 95 respondents (46.8%) were OES and 108 (53.2%) were SIEs. One hundred and thirty one expatriates (64.5%) were married, and only 35.5 % were still single. The expatriates had been in the country from nine months to more than 20 years. The age of respondents ranged from under 35 to 50 years, with a majority (30.5%) fell under 35 years of age. Ninety-six respondents (47.4%) had a college degree and 58% had a bachelor's degree. A majority of the expatriates (48.3%) came from European countries, 52 (25.6%) were from Australia/New Zealand region, 42 (20.7%) were from Asian countries and 11 (5.4%) came from North America. Most of these expatriates (90.6%) had experiences working in foreign countries prior to expatriation in Malaysia. Only 19 expatriates (9.4%) had no experience before coming to Malaysia. It was also found that 179 respondents (88.2%) held managerial posts as compared to those holding the non-managerial positions (11.8%).

When asked whether the respondents speak other languages than their native, 200 respondents (98.5%) claimed they speak other languages than their native and only three (1.5%) did not speak other languages at all. Ninety-three (45.8%) admitted that they were very fluent in language(s) other than their own, 85 (41.9%) were somewhat fluent and only 22 (10.8%) were not fluent.

In describing their ability to speak the native language of Malaysia, 121 (59.6%) admitted that their ability to speak the native language (Bahasa Malaysia) were limited to very short and simple phrases only. Fifty-eight (28.6%) knew basic grammatical structure and spoke with a limited vocabulary. Seventeen respondents (8.4%) indicated that they understood conversation on simple topics and only seven (1.4%) rated themselves as fluent in the language. A majority of the respondents (170 or 83.7%) indicated that they had no training prior at all prior to expatriation, while the remaining 33 (16.3%) did undergo a certain type of training related to expatriation.

### Hypotheses Testing

This hypothesis aims at looking at the pattern of adjustment between two groups of expatriates—OEs and SIEs. Previous studies seemed to show a different pattern of adjustment. Thus, a *t*-test was conducted to test hypothesis 1. Table 1 displays the results of the *t*-test. The table shows that the mean for OEs is higher than that of the SIEs. This means that OEs, on average, have higher adjustment than SIEs. The results show that there is no significant difference in the adjustment pattern of the two groups of expatriates. Since the results shows that there is no significance difference between the two groups, further analysis on the adjustment pattern could not be conducted. Clearly, the results of the analysis did not support the findings by Peltokorpi and Froese (2009), which found that there was a difference in the adjustment of OEs and SIEs.

Table 1: T-Test Results of Differences between OEs and SIEs

Variable	Coming to Malaysia	N	Mean	F	SD	Sig
Adjustment	Sent by parent company	95	4.56	4.94	.414	.027
	Individual/voluntary	108	4.45			
Basis					.354	

\* $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2 aimed at identifying the variations in the patterns of work, general, interaction and the overall adjustment among the expatriates. The results of the analysis revealed that that respondents displayed high levels of adjustment, with all respondents (100%) indicating levels of four and above (4=adjusted and 5 very well-adjusted). The respondents' general adjustment appeared more varied with a range from 4.06 to 4.69. Even though some of the scores were a lower as compared to the other two dimensions, the mean level of general adjustment was still considered high, which is 4.48. For the interaction adjustment, the scores range between 4.37 and 4.46, with





an average of 4.40 and it also suggests a slightly high interaction adjustment to the new culture. The mean level of work adjustment was 4.70 (scores ranged from 4.61 to 4.81). Finally, the average level of overall reported adjustment is 4.50 with a standard deviation of .39, signaling that on the whole respondents appeared to be adjusted to general, interaction and working with Malaysian co-workers.

## **Discussions and Conclusions**

### **Discussions**

The main objectives of this article were to examine the relationship between work-role characteristics and the adjustment of Malaysian hotel expatriates and to explore the extent to which the characteristics would explain variations in the adjustment patterns of the expatriates. The adjustment patterns were examined based on the overall adjustment and the dimensions of this adjustment. Besides, the paper also looked at the difference of adjustment between OEs and SIEs of hotel industry.

As the analysis revealed, a majority of the expatriates came from European countries. This has been consistent since Ruddy's (1991) study on career development of hotel managers in the Asian Pacific, where he found that 68% of the respondents surveyed were from Europe and North America. It seems that the pattern of movement of European expatriates is still consistent until now, where more Europeans are keen to explore, travel and work in a foreign country.

Of the total number of expatriates surveyed, most were SIEs. This also fits the recent and changing trend in expatriation whereby individuals were more interested in taking charge of their career trajectories without the direct support of an organization (Carr, Kerr & Thorn, 2005). The percentage of SIEs also supports Myers and Pringle (2005) claim that this group of expatriates forms a larger and even more potent global labor market segment than OEs these days.

Interestingly, the result suggests no significant difference in the adjustment pattern between the two groups of expatriates. That means, the two groups of expatriates in hotel industry did not differ in their adjustment to Malaysian culture. Even without the support from parent companies, SIEs had proven that they were still able to learn, adjust and adapt to the lives in the new culture. This could be due to their ability to learn and cope with the new environment, together with their perception of the facilities available in the country. As SIEs initiated their own travel, they could be more open about the new culture and more motivated to explore the culture without having to depend much on the organization. The results clearly contradict previous findings by Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) which found that OEs and SIEs differ in their adjustment, specifically in general and interaction adjustments.

The results could be explained in two ways. First, empirical studies conducted within the context of hotel industry have generally suggested that emphasis placed on certain skills and competencies may not completely conform to the more generic skills proposed in general expatriation literature. For example, for the OEs, they seemed to have no adjustment problem as those in hotel industry usually possess the most desirable attributes such as people skills, adaptability, flexibility, emotional security, language ability, cultural sensitivity, interpersonal skills, functional and technical skills and international motivation (Kriegel, 2000; Shay & Tracey, 1997). Only a small percentage of these expatriates admitted that they had had some sorts of training prior to the move to Malaysia, but interestingly, more than 90 per cent of them reported that they had experience working abroad before coming to Malaysia. In fact, most claimed they had been on foreign assignments more than twice. Of the expatriates sent by parent companies, only a few had some sort of training prior to expatriation. This suggests that training did not play an important role in expatriate adjustment but previous experience that they had could have helped them in adjusting to Malaysian culture. The international nature of the hospital industry, coupled with the experience that these expatriates had, could have served as a buffer toward their adjustment in the country.

On the other hand, it is known that SIEs made their own decision to move and work abroad. They perceived their overseas experience as a means of self-development or part of some other personal agenda. Their main aim was not at achieving specific company goals (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) but about exploring new cultures and looking for new opportunities. The motivations would have enabled them to easily explore the new environment. The interaction and possible formation of social relationships with Malaysian could have allowed SIEs to gain insights into cultural norms, facilitating further interaction with the hosts. With the self-motivation and willingness to venture a new life abroad, SIEs would also face less adjustment problem in the country.

Taken together, the pattern of adjustment of the two groups of expatriates should be taken into consideration in conceptual and empirical accounts of research in expatriation. In the past, research on expatriates mainly examined expatriates as a group, without differentiating the two (OEs and SIEs). Despite the notable differences that exist (e.g. Inkson, 1997; Suutari and Brewster, 2000), only limited research were found to focus on SIEs. This could possibly lead to misleading empirical results since very little is known about the pattern of adjustment of SIEs as the differences between the two have not been widely researched. Only recently research on SIEs has begun to highlight on the emerging distinction between the two groups of expatriates. One of the reasons that that could explain this is that we began to realize that globalization has allowed for rapid movement of SIEs and their numbers are now increasing. Besides, scholars have begun to recognize the added value that SIEs could bring to the individual's career capital (Inkson & Myers, 2003).

Meanwhile, the analysis on the variations in the patterns of work, general, interaction and the overall adjustment among the expatriates confirms the value of unpacking concept of adjustment and presenting it as a multidimensional concept. As hypothesized, while on the whole, the respondents are well-adjusted to working and living in Malaysia, they do show variations across the adjustment dimensions examined.

### **Limitations**

In spite of the significant contributions we discussed above, several limitations need to be acknowledged. The first is the reliance on a single respondent for the independent and dependent variables may have contributed to common method variance. Although this issue is pervasive in field research in social sciences, it is particularly salient when measuring variables more susceptible to perceptual bias. Therefore, when designing the questionnaire survey for the study, attempts were made to minimize same source bias by placing the independent and dependent variables in separate sections of the questionnaire. Furthermore, if the same respondent bias or common method bias was in effect and inflated the correlations among the variables, the self-rated individual, organizational and nonwork variables should have had stronger effects on the expatriate adjustment, which was not the case. Hence, the concern for same respondent bias or common method bias was further reduced.

Secondly, this study also has limitations in its statistical techniques and data as it only looked at only one particular industry (i.e. hotel). The hotel industry was chosen because despite the extraordinary interest of MNHCs and IJVHCs in expanding their operations globally, very little is known about expatriates in this industry. Another limitation with regard to this is the sample size itself. Response rates within groups are particularly important for all multivariate analysis (Klein, Dansereau & Hall, 1994). In the present study, the 203 respondents are rather small samples for multivariate analyses and this could lead to some problems when estimating regression weights in relation to hypotheses testing, especially on SEM technique. But due to the time constraints and the small population of expatriates in the industry, the number of respondents was considered appropriate (return rate of more than 70 per cent). Also, owing to the constraints of time and financial resources, the samples of this study are also limited to expatriates located in Peninsular Malaysia. Thus, generalization of the results (that all expatriates in Malaysian hotel industry) should be made with appropriate caution. Besides the statistical techniques, data and sample size, there is also a limitation with the instruments adopted by the study.

Even though it is acknowledged that the instruments used in the data collection were adopted from past research as they had shown high reliability and validity, the instruments were still applied with caution as in hotel industry some of the supports (especially human



resource support) could have not been provided by the organizations or they are already available to the expatriates due to the nature of the industry (i.e. car, housing, etc.).

Next, the cross-sectional nature of the present research also contributes to the limitation of the study. Clearly, a longitudinal research that tracks the adjustment progress and communication activities during expatriation is needed. In addition, statements of causality based on the results of statistical techniques (such as multiple regression and SEM) are useful in making inferences, but must be treated with caution given the correlational nature of the data.

### Conclusions

Although research on expatriation management has been numerous, the findings from the present research represent an incremental step towards better understanding of the complex phenomenon of the adjustment pattern of SIEs and the relationship between work-role characteristics and expatriate adjustment. This research also extends our understanding of expatriate adjustment by looking at those in the hotel industry and SIEs in the industry as past research seemed to focus on OEs and those in other industries, especially manufacturing. Expatriates in this industry, as well as the SIEs are relatively under-researched groups as the focus of previous research was normally on OEs of multinational companies of industries other than hotel. Hotel OEs and the high proportion of SIEs give support to the importance of studying further these under-explored groups. The results of the study indicated that in hotel industry, expatriate assignments and those who initiated work abroad did not differ in term of their adjustment. This contradicts a previous study (involving expatriates in multi industry) which found that these expatriates differ in their adjustment especially in interaction and work-related adjustment.

The analysis of the study also confirms the value of unpacking concept of adjustment and presenting it as a multidimensional concept. As hypothesized, while on the whole the expatriates in our sample are well-adjusted to working and living in Malaysia, they do show variations across the adjustment dimensions examined.

In sum, the findings from the study provide further understanding of adjustment among expatriates and it is hoped that the study will be a step further in enhancing our understanding of expatriates, especially in the hotel industry located in a multicultural society like Malaysia.

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